

GROUND FISH ADVISORY PANEL REPORT ON MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARY CORAL RESEARCH AND RESTORATION CLOSURES – FISHERY
MANAGEMENT PLAN (FMP) AMENDMENT FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed and discussed the proposals under this item and offers the following comments.

1. **The GAP supports the No Action alternative.** This follows our constituency's clear, strong desire. However, understanding that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) wants to keep open lines of communication with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (Sanctuaries, ONMS) and have future modifications to fishing regulations continue to come through the Council process under the guidelines of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and recognizing the existing deep-sea coral work already underway at Sur Ridge, **the GAP would accept Alternative 2, with a 10-year life and a sunset at the end of FY 2035.**
2. The GAP strongly opposes Alternative 1 (either option), due to its clear negative impacts to existing fishing activity occurring in the areas proposed for closure. Before we close further grounds to fishing, it is important to demonstrate that closures are essential to the success of these coral restoration methods.
3. If the Council selects an action alternative, the GAP supports the proposed fishery management plan amendment language as provided in [Attachment 2](#) under this agenda item.

GAP members noted the source of the funding for the coral research and restoration work being proposed was the accidental sinking of a derelict dry dock a few hundred meters within Sanctuary boundaries. Shipwrecks and other similar sunken objects are known to provide a benefit to sessile marine organisms (e.g., corals and sponges) requiring hard, durable substrates to attach to. Shipwrecks, like rugose natural reefs, typically greatly enhance marine life diversity, richness, and abundance in their immediate area. In many areas, vessels are purposely sunk to create reefs. Yet, the dry dock in this case is not being proposed to be used in this manner as a part of the settlement. The Sanctuaries are instead using the settlement funding to propose researching and restoring coral through restricting access for fishing. West Coast fishermen continue to feel immense pressure to remove fishing grounds for non-fishing related projects (such as this proposal or offshore wind energy). Instead of closing new areas, GAP members note several deep-water areas already closed to bottom contact gears exist where the ONMS could research coral propagation. The objectives of the settlement to do coral restoration and research could be experimented on within existing Groundfish Exclusion Areas (GEA) in the former Cowcod Conservation Area and Marine Protected Areas. Further, the GAP continues to recommend that some portion of the funding Sanctuaries receives be used to periodically survey the wreck of the YFD-70 Dry Dock and document the long-term impacts there.

The Sur Ridge area (Alternative 2) covers roughly 35 sq. nm, which is comparable in size to the entire city of San Francisco. This is several orders of magnitude larger than the size of the dry dock area and would be a big loss to the fishing community. While there hasn't been as much historical fishing effort in Sur Ridge, this is a large area that could become important to fishing communities under the unknown impacts of climate change and shifting fishing effort given reductions in annual catch limits.

The GAP strongly opposes Alternative 1, closing the Año Nuevo and Ascension Canyon areas, which overlap with important fishing grounds. These areas could become more important in the future, given recent fisheries restrictions to protect whales in the Dungeness crab fishery, and to support the rebuilding of yelloweye rockfish, quillback rockfish, and salmon. In discussions with the GAP, the Sanctuaries proposed flexibility in implementing closures - such as a phased-in approach of implementing closures with Sur Ridge coming first and Año Nuevo/Ascension Canyon closing in two years - as a potential method of allowing fisheries some time to recover before closures take effect. Regardless of a delay, the GAP opposes Alternative 1.

The GAP also understands that the settlement funding is allocated for ten years. If the Council moves forward with any action alternative, we recommend that the regulations sunset the GEA in ten years. After that time, if the ONMS wanted to continue any coral research or restoration in the area it should be opened to fishing, or they would need to come back through the Council process to petition for the area to remain closed.

We appreciate the work and documentation conducted by Sanctuary staff, the mapping tool that was built, and their reaching out to the Council and working through the process as they have. We continue to encourage Sanctuaries to help protect traditional sustainable uses of the ocean waters within Sanctuary boundaries and to help the public continue to have access to those waters' rich resources for fishing and navigation. The GAP encourages Sanctuaries to spearhead an effort to explore and quantify the potential impacts of offshore wind development to natural ecosystem functions that support the biodiversity and fisheries within Sanctuary waters. Wind turbines within or near Sanctuary waters have the potential to greatly reduce wind speeds and thereby the natural upwelling of nutrient-rich deep waters into the photic zone. This upwelling is the primary driver of the natural productivity of the California Current Ecosystem. While even small changes to our fishing activities undergo immense environmental assessment prior to implementation, we are concerned that offshore wind energy is being pushed through too quickly without sufficient understanding of impacts to ocean resources, and we would love to see Sanctuaries resources support analysis of these impacts.

PFMC
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